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The Honorable Edward Knipling
Administrator, Agricultural Research Service
United State Department of Agriculture
14th and Independence Ave, SW
Washington DC 20250

Dear Administrator Knipling:

I am writing to request that you lift the job search freeze the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has placed on the Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Center (GFHNRC) in Grand Forks, North Dakota.

The job search freeze was placed on GFHNRC due to the Administration's fiscal year (FY) 2009 budget proposal to close the Grand Forks center. As a result, GFHNRC has suspended job searches for four open researcher positions, including three in the Center's growing obesity research initiative. The job search freeze will further delay the Center's ability to address the obesity epidemic and diet-related health issues in this country, particularly among the highest risk populations of rural and Native Americans.

I understand that as an Administration official you must back the budget proposal even if it means cutting your current agency budget by 7.5 percent. But I also know that you do not want to stand in the way of measured progress in addressing the obesity problem in the United States. By lifting the suspension, you will allow the lengthy 9- to 12- month search process to begin as Congress debates, and likely rejects, the Administration's ill-conceived budget proposal.

I should also tell you that as a member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee that will write your agency's budget, I am firmly committed to continuing funding for the Grand Forks center to keep it open in FY 2009 and beyond. My recent visits to the Center have only reinforced my belief that the Administration's proposal to close GFHNRC is nonsensical and without merit. I am also encouraged by conversations I have had with my colleagues that Congress will reject the Administration's proposal and will fully fund GFHNRC.

That being said, it seems both reasonable and prudent to lift the job search suspension to allow GFHNRC to begin the lengthy job search process. I look forward to your decision.

Sincerely,



Byron L. Dorgan
U.S. Senator